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Hints  
On  
Private Devotion.



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HINTS  
ON  
**Private Devotion.**

BY THE  
REV. C. MARRIOTT, B.D.  
FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE.

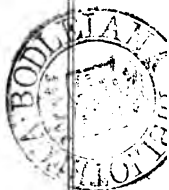
“Κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου, πρόσευξαι τῷ Πατρὶ σου τῷ  
ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ.”

S. MATT. vi. 6.

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Third Edition.  
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LITTLEMORE:  
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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND  
**ALEXANDER,**  
**Lord Bishop of Brechin,**  
IN THE EARNEST HOPE OF GOD'S BLESSING  
ON HIS EPISCOPAL LABOURS,  
AND IN TOKEN OF A COMMON INTEREST IN A BROTHER  
THIS DAY  
TO BE ADMITTED TO  
THE SACRED ORDER OF DEACON,  
**This little Work,**  
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY  
HIS LORDSHIP'S  
SINCERELY ATTACHED FRIEND AND SERVANT,  
THE AUTHOR.



*Invention of the Cross,*  
M.DCCC.XLVIII.



# CONTENTS.

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	Page.
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
I. ON REALIZING THE PRESENCE OF GOD . . . . .	3
II. ON CONFESSION . . . . .	7
III. ON PRAISE . . . . .	13
IV. ON THANKSGIVING . . . . .	18
V. ON PRAYER . . . . .	23
VI. ON INTERCESSION . . . . .	30
VII. ON ACTS OF FAITH, CONTRITION, ETC. . . . .	36
VIII. ON COMMEMORATION . . . . .	40
IX. ON THE USE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE . . . . .	44
X. ON READING IN GENERAL . . . . .	51
XI. ON MEDITATION . . . . .	56
XII. ON SELF-EXAMINATION . . . . .	61
XIII. ON FASTING . . . . .	65
XIV. ON RETIREMENT . . . . .	71
XV. ON PUBLISHED BOOKS OF DEVOTION . . . . .	75
XVI. ON PRIVATE FORMS . . . . .	80
XVII. ON PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION . . . . .	84
XVIII. ON WANDERING THOUGHTS . . . . .	94
CONCLUSION . . . . .	99



## PREFACE.

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THE writer of the following Hints would be very glad to find himself mistaken in the impression he has, that instruction with respect to Private Devotion has been, of late years, very much neglected. The present little work is intended as an essay towards supplying young persons, otherwise well educated and well disposed, with some little direction in this important matter, supposing them to be really desirous of such aid. It is not meant to supersede any of the Manuals of Devotion now in use, which, in fact, are very numerous, and many of them good, but, more or less, to supply a deficiency which no book can adequately meet, that of instruction with respect to the manner of using them, or

of adapting them to each person's own needs.

It is to be feared that the usual fate of such books is somewhat as follows : if not entirely neglected from the first, they are taken up for a time with some little interest, but then either something in them gives a distaste for the use of them, or the length of Devotion provided for is thought burdensome, or the interest of the mind flags, till, after awhile, little or nothing is done ; or some indulged sin alienates the soul from Communion with God, and the book and the practice of Devotion are laid aside together. In some cases, perhaps, such a book is kept in occasional use, and at intervals, before few and half unwilling Communions, a chapter or two of religious matter is hurried over with little thought. Few, comparatively, are those who begin early and maintain steadily a vigorous and regular practice of Devotion.

Much of this evil might be prevented by care on the part of those who have charge of the education of youth. But it must not be only by giving books that this is to be accomplished. Actual oral instruction, and the inculcation of a sufficient practice of the elementary and essential parts of Devotion, are necessary for effecting the object. Few books have been mentioned by name in the course of this work, as it was intended rather to suggest what might be done equally with different forms. Nothing has been said of any measures of Devotion far out of the common way, and probably there may be many omissions, even with respect to ordinary practice, which the writer will regret when observed or pointed out to him. For the present he has done what he could, and only begs to be read for edification, not for criticism.



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# HINTS ON PRIVATE DEVOTION.

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## Introduction.

THERE are many young persons, some, perhaps, advanced in life, who would be glad to give more time and attention to Religious Duties than they have been in the habit of doing, but who scarcely know how to employ themselves in the way of Devotion. Any one who feels this difficulty may be glad of a few words from one who has felt it, and who is anxious to afford to others helps which they may use better than he is able to use them himself. The subject is really a simple and easy one, but we have to deal in it throughout with matters of Faith, which vanish and become impalpable to the unpractised when they attempt to grasp them. Our Christian Life is in an unseen world, in which those only can discern things clearly who have their senses exercised by a continuance of thoughtful action, in obedience to the Motions of that Spirit Who works in the children of God.

Reason, with the light of Christian instruction and the visual Power of the Indwelling Spirit, can distinguish the outlines of the objects of Faith. What we want is to fix the attention and bring the will into action upon them, and upon all things in relation to them. And in the following pages it will be endeavoured to enumerate the principal points in which we are able, and, as Christians, are bound, thus to fix our attention and put forth our will, in our daily or occasional acts of Devotion. Under this head we may include *all those acts in which we consciously endeavour to place ourselves in communion with God, and which we do directly with reference to Him; not merely to His Law, that is, but to Himself.* Accordingly, in attempting to give a connected view of these duties, it may be well to begin with that which lies at the root of them, the practice of realizing the Presence of God.

## I.

**On Realizing the Presence of God.**

THE first and most essential part of Devotion is that the soul should present itself before God. When Adam fell, he shunned God's Presence. When Enoch walked with God, He made him a preacher of righteousness on earth, and then translated him to glory. "*Walk before Me, and be thou perfect,*"<sup>a</sup> said God to Abraham. Moses, who "*was faithful in all His house,*"<sup>b</sup> was admitted to speak with Him "*face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.*"<sup>c</sup> And in the Law His people were taught, at stated times, to present themselves before Him, not as a mere carnal observance, but that they might be as His children, and walk in the light of His Countenance. For thus it was taken by the Psalmist, whom the Spirit taught the hidden things of God's Law: "*My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?*"<sup>d</sup> And it is no less the rule of the Gospel, nay, more evidently, "*Our*

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xvii. 1.<sup>c</sup> Exod. xxxiii. 11.<sup>b</sup> Heb. iii. 5; Num. xii. 7.<sup>d</sup> Ps. xlii. 2.

*communion is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,<sup>e</sup>* and “*Having boldness to enter into the holy place, by the Blood of Jesus,*” we are exhorted to “*DRAW NIGH with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.*”<sup>f</sup>

Indeed it is the same in all the earthly shadows by which we are educated to the understanding of Heavenly things. The beginning of obedience is to come at call. The child that shuns its father's presence, or his eye, is not as it ought to be ; and if we would keep children to what is good, and turn them from what is evil, we know that they must be frequently in the presence and under the eye of those whom they believe to be good. And as they are affected towards that presence, so are they generally to goodness itself. I do not speak of that innocent wish to be by themselves which they may sometimes have, when they know they are not doing wrong. That may be with them what in older persons produces a reverent carefulness to separate between even innocent amusements and acts of Devotion, as by not using sacred and secular music alternately, and the like. Such a retirement from the presence of their parents is soon over, and, in the best children, usually half feigned while it lasts, and they would feel desolate indeed if they had

<sup>e</sup> 1 S. John i. 8.

<sup>f</sup> Heb. x. 19.

not that presence to return to, nay, if they were debarred from it even for a limited time.

I have dwelt on this analogy because it is the closest we have, and the deepest lessons of religion are to be learned from God's dealing with children through their parents. We will not now enlarge upon the various methods which different writers have suggested, or which holy men have used, for reminding themselves of the Presence of God. These belong rather to the study and varied practice of Devotion than to that simple essence of it which is our present object. And it requires some care to avoid an artificial way of using them, by which we may come to hold converse with a phantom of our own imagination instead of the true God. The point now to be insisted on is, that whatever it may be that we have to do at such times, be it more or less, this we must frequently do—present ourselves before God in soul and body, looking to Him, and conscious that His eye is on us. This may not be easy to one who has long neglected it, but at least let the effort be made at the beginning of your morning and evening prayers, and sustained, as best you are able, through them, and all other times of Devotion. It will become easier by practice, and especially by the removal of whatever you know or suspect

## **6     ON REALIZING THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

to be displeasing in His sight. And however much trouble it may cost you at first, be assured that you will never repent of having striven with yourself and constrained yourself to spend at least some portions of your time every day, as in the Presence of your Heavenly Father. You cannot find Him by your own understanding, but you may come to Him by Faith, and open your heart before Him, and beg Him with earnest longing to look upon you and manifest Himself to you. And the first principle of Devotion is that you should thus come before Him frequently, and abide with Him so as to have time for a real and serious converse with Him. What that converse should be, we proceed to consider.

## II.

**On Confession.**

IT may be well to speak first on Confession, although in the Lord's Prayer, which is the most perfect model of Devotion, there is no mention of our sins till towards the end. However, in the very first petition, after the words which bring us, as children, before our Heavenly Father, there is an acknowledgment at once of His Infinite Holiness, and of the difficulty of our bearing ourselves as becomes His children. We pray that His Name may be hallowed, meaning that without His aid we are unable duly to hallow it. This feeling meets us when we come before Him. How are we to fit ourselves to this perfect, all-pervading Holiness? Were we very Saints, we should still have occasion to begin with this petition, lest there should be any thing in our doings before God wherein we failed to do honour to His Holiness, and to sanctify Him in our hearts.

But, taking us as we are, there is great reason why we should do more than this, and begin our chief Devotions as our Church begins the Morn-

ing and Evening Prayer, with actual confession of sin, and prayer that "the things that we do at this present" may be acceptable, as well as that we may be enabled better to order our future life.

Most of us probably do thus begin our prayers, especially in the evening, but it may be worth while to add a few suggestions as to the manner in which this should be done.

The use of Confession is to renounce the things we confess, and to put them away from hindering our communion with God. "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me,*<sup>s</sup>" says the Psalmist. "*Your iniquities,*" says the Prophet, "*have separated between you and your God.*<sup>h</sup>" We know what He has done to take them away, but that great work of mercy does not take effect for us while we hold to them, or pretend that we are not guilty of them. It is sins repented of and confessed that are blotted out, as though they had never been, by the Blood of the Lamb of God.

Now we have not merely a sinful nature to repent of, but actual sins in thought, word, and deed. And our Confession ought to be of these, putting them away with the utmost renunciation of our will, acknowledging judgment due for

<sup>s</sup> Ps. lxvi. 18.

<sup>h</sup> Is. lix. 2.

them, seeking to have them indeed blotted out, and especially to have all manner of consent to them, or to the like of them, destroyed out of ourselves, though it should be like cutting off a limb, or burning out poisoned flesh. If Confession is to be real, it must be PARTICULAR, of definite *acts*, when there are such on the memory unconfessed, and of the chief *kinds* of sin of which you have formerly been guilty, if you have, by God's help, been kept from recent transgression, and have rather to humble yourselves for your general unworthiness.

And here it is necessary to notice the case of one who has never yet fairly renounced his sins. Such an one may sometimes feel as if he were able to draw near to God, when the thought of them is not fresh upon him, but there will be a deep gulf, seen or unseen, between him and all real Divine Communion. How is this separation to be done away? It were idle to tell the poor sinner that he must cure himself of all his bad habits before he can have access to God. As well might one tell the sick man to make himself whole and then go shew himself to the physician. But on the other hand he may be told what we should tell a patient going to the physician with ever so bad a case, namely, that if he would recover his health, he must conceal nothing, refuse

nothing. He must make up his mind to declare his whole case, and to accept the remedies prescribed. The main thing required of a Penitent is, that he should put his *will* fairly on the side of obedience, and strive to hide nothing from himself of what he ought to do, to keep no recess in his heart which he does not open to the light of God. So doing, he ought to be of good hope, though still compassed with infirmity.

However it will be a very great help to him, at least for once, to take a general view of his whole past life, marking all the wilful transgressions he can remember, and those most of all which were most against conscience, and to cast all at the foot of the Cross, with the fullest renunciation of them from his will and consent, and determination never to look back on them with any kind of concurrence or complacency, but always, as God shall enable him, to hold them in utter abhorrence.

Such is the course the Church recommends to those who have been kept from the Holy Communion of Christ's Body and Blood by the consciousness of wilful sin. And where the work is, as must but too frequently be the case, too hard for the penitent so to accomplish by himself, as to set his conscience safely and healthily at peace, she further offers the aid of those who

bear Christ's own commission to remit sins on earth. In this place we will say no more on the subject than that it is a help in time of need to many souls, and the greater help, the more open and unreserved they are in their communications, and the more entirely they look upon their spiritual Pastor as the Minister of Christ, and acting in His Name.

But whether you thus seal your repentance by the act of Confession to God's Minister, and receive the seal of His acceptance of it in Absolution, or conduct the work as best you may without external aids, this at least you must do—Confess before God and humble yourself to Him for every wilful sin that you can remember. When this is once well done it is easier to keep the conscience clear. The attention can be concentrated on a shorter time, and what is renounced as soon as detected does not leave such a stain as what had long held possession of the will.

The Church, of course, furnishes forms of Confession of a general kind, to which we ought to attach a particular meaning, so far as we know the kinds of sin in which we have most offended. The Psalms contain expressions in which each one may probably understand his own sins still more distinctly. But in our private Devotions

we ought at least at times to say expressly before God, "I have done this and that," naming at least the kind of sin without reserve. Only let this be done very solemnly, and with great self-abasement, as a child would speak to a parent, in acknowledging what it knew to be a serious offence.

## III.

**On Praise.**

THE act of Praise has always formed a chief part in the Devotions of the Church, and we are taught that it is a great part of the employment of the Blessed Angels and Saints, in the very manifest Presence of God. We know that He needs not our Praise, and yet we know that He does graciously accept it. In the congregation our united Praise is the means of our sharing with one another those blessed thoughts of God, and of His Almighty Power, and Infinite Goodness, which we express in words. And of the Spirits above it is said, that they cry "*one to another*" in their Praises of Him.<sup>1</sup> But the solitary Christian is not without occasion for Praising God, though he should be where there is none to hear. The outward act of reciting the Praises of God awakens his inward thoughts, and calls all his powers of body, soul, and spirit to unite in this, their holiest and most blessed occupation. Man is, in himself, a little world, and when he sings or recites the Praises of his Creator, all that little

<sup>1</sup> Is. vi. 3.

world becomes a kind of Heaven, and is filled with a Divine harmony. And all the images of things without, which are there not merely as floating shadows, but as living parts of his own being, join in the chorus, and the whole Church in Heaven and earth does, in a manner, chant within him, for they are all, spiritually, members of Christ; nay, it is not too bold to say that the very Spirit of Christ cries in him "*Abba Father!*"<sup>k</sup>

And the Blessed Angels, who "*minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation,*"<sup>l</sup> rejoice in their acts of Praise, and join with them in ascribing all the glory to the Lord of men and Angels. And Saints, far off on earth or in Paradise, feel, without knowing it, the impulse of each others' adoration, and join in with it, like strings that vibrate to the same tone without touching each other. Thus the act which seems most solitary is really social, and, as it were choral, and every note of devout Praise pervades the universe, and unites with the whole mystic harmony of Creation.

Thus we are especially led to view it, if we meditate on the opening words of the Lord's Prayer, "*Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name!*" We say not "My Father," only, but "*Our Father,*" uniting ourselves with

<sup>k</sup> Rom. viii. 15.

<sup>l</sup> Heb. i. 14.

the whole blessed company of His children in Heaven and earth; and then we pray that His *Name be hallowed*, at once taking a view of His Glory in Heaven, and striving with earnest desire to set It forth to ourselves and to all creation, and to honour It in ourselves and in every thing that is.

I have spoken before of the humiliation and purification which are requisite before we can enter rightly upon this holy exercise. And even after such preparation the thoughtful and earnest mind will still have to renew its hold, at times, on Him through Whom it has the right of access to this near approach to the Throne, and to remind itself that in Him its Prayers and Praises may ascend, as sweet incense, though, without Him, unworthy to be accepted.

But this very feeling of unworthiness, and of the need of our Blessed Lord's Mediation, which is apt to accompany the holy exercise of Praise, is a witness to the value and use of it, and shows how it lifts us above ourselves and the things of earth, and places us in view of the objects of our Faith. Very important is it that this exercise should not be let slip from our private Devotions, but sustained and strengthened with all the efforts we can throw into it, after the example of all holy and devout men. We are well furnished for it

in the Hymns and Canticles used by the Church, and in many of the Psalms of David. I say many of them, because they are not all exactly of that character. That book comprehends other kinds of Devotion, always indeed with a reference to the Praise of God, but often rather in the form of prayer, confession, meditation, or meditative narration. It may often be useful to *sing* these, even when alone, for indeed if they are to be read or recited with understanding, the heart must sing, and the voice must at least frame its tones according to the spirit of singing.

Sometimes, however, it will be well to make use of very few words, and rather let the mind dwell upon the Almighty, in His Own Glorious Perfections, than on any multiplied expression of His Works and Acts, after the example of the Powers above, crying to one another "*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, Which was, and is, and is to come!*"<sup>m</sup> And when the mind is so moved, it may be well even to dispense with words altogether, seeing that, as S. Gregory tells us, the soul speaks to God when it is stirred with desires toward Him within.<sup>n</sup> But when we are slow, and need to be stirred up to the work, we must take the words into our mouth, and try our best

<sup>m</sup> Rev. iv. 8.    <sup>n</sup> S. Greg. *Morals of the Book of Job.* B. II. § 11. p. 75, Oxford Trans.

to send our heart with them toward Him. This is not formalism, but a sincere endeavour after spiritual Devotion, and one which often succeeds in the end, though practised for some time with difficulty, and little apparent fruit. Only let it not lapse into formalism, as it may, if the outward habit of using the words is retained, and the endeavour to send the heart along with them dropped.

## IV.

**On Thanksgiving.**

THANKSGIVING is nearly allied to praise, and in the Lord's Prayer seems to be merged in the two acts of praise and of charity. In the words "Our Father," we sum up the acknowledgment of unnumbered mercies, and proffer, in a manner, the only return that we can make directly to God for them, to "*accept the cup of salvation, and call on the Name of the Lord.*" And both by including all our brethren in the prayer, and by the declaration of forgiveness to all who have offended us, we mark our desire to requite His Mercy by doing toward those whom He Loves that which agrees with His Love toward them. And in the desire that His Kingdom may come, and His Will be done, we express not only that so it ought to be, but likewise that we are bound by His Benefits to delight in His glory, and in the obedience of all creatures to Him.

Thanksgiving should never be altogether omitted in private Devotion, and should be habitual for the mercies of which we have continued pos-

session, as well as special and particular for those which are singular or of less common occurrence. When we are permitted to partake of the Holy Communion, there should be a distinct act of Thanksgiving for that blessing, and so when we are brought safely through any danger, or to the end of any work that we have in hand, or when any good befalls our friends, or our rulers in Church or State, or the Church in general, or any of our Christian brethren. The Thanksgiving may be particular, though offered in general words; thus the *Te Deum* has often been used as a chant of Thanksgiving, and the Lord's Prayer itself may be used as an offering up of the soul afresh to Him who has granted us fresh proofs of His Love. Many of the Psalms, however, contain matter specially suited to particular occasions of Thanksgiving.

It is indeed a higher perfection to love God for Himself than for His gifts. But while we retain any regard for His gifts in themselves, it is idle to pretend to pass them by in our regards toward Him. Nay, if we do so, we are in danger of forgetting Him in them. Whatever affection we have toward them, ought to pass on to Him from whom they come; and the habit of turning our joy on account of them into gratitude, tends directly toward that higher perfection of regard-

ing Him alone in Himself, for we cannot but see that He is more in Himself than even His own best gifts. We know and can guess but little of a really perfect state, but probably we may suppose that the vision of God hereafter will not prevent us from perceiving and taking an interest in His creatures, only it will be in Him. All our regards toward them will centre in Him, as those of a family of children to each other centre in their father. For we are told that the Angels who wait upon Christ's little ones here do *always* in Heaven behold the face of the Father.<sup>p</sup> Thus it seems their ministry does not hinder their contemplation of God. They are able to keep him *always* in view, even while they are employed in ministering to them that shall be heirs of salvation. So may it be with the Blessed hereafter. They may delight in the society of each other and of the Holy Angels, and in all the blessings of that happy state, and turn all that joy into Thankfulness, through their constant sense of the Presence of Him Who gave them all.

And, further, the manner in which it has pleased Him to give us His greatest benefits, yea to communicate Himself to us, is one which naturally calls forth the feeling of thankfulness as distinct from mere adoring contemplation. For

<sup>p</sup> S. Matt. xviii. 10.

the very communication of Himself is by means of certain acts which we can consider separately, and which are so Divine and glorious in themselves that we cannot but admire and delight in them through all Eternity. And the company of the Blessed is represented by S. John as speaking of them in its "*new song*," saying "*Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*"<sup>1</sup>

The creatures of God are good, and to be used with Thanksgiving, and that is a good use of them for which we can, with a clear and unburdened conscience, give God thanks. Nothing, perhaps, is more likely to keep us to a right and moderate use of them, than the constant practice of lifting up the heart in thankfulness for every blessing we enjoy. And if we are tempted to forget our higher privileges and hopes, we may also remind ourselves of them by bringing ourselves to a distinct act of Thanksgiving for them.

It is true that we cannot always command a thankful temper and feeling, but this need not hinder us from offering our Thanksgivings as we

<sup>1</sup> Rev. v. 9, 10.

may. If we are reasonably convinced that our thanks are due, and desirous to offer them as an acknowledgment that we have received great and undeserved benefits, our Thanksgiving is sincere, though it may still be wanting in warmth and liveliness. Any such deficiency should humble us, but not deter or discourage. And perhaps there are few of us who may not resort to the help of recollecting some especial blessing that they *feel* so warmly, that they *can* give thanks for it with something like fervency. If this be a temporal one, here is again cause for humiliation, that we should have so little faith; but that leaves room for the hope that when our faith in things unseen becomes more lively, our gratitude for Heavenly blessings may keep pace with the improvement.

## V.

**On Prayer.**

I SPEAK now of Prayer not in its most general meaning, in which it is almost as extensive as Devotion, but in the special sense of petition. It is evident, both from Holy Scripture and from reason, that a great part of our Devotions must consist of petitions for things needful for us, and the Lord's Prayer itself is almost wholly composed of them. We need not enter here into the metaphysical difficulty which some raise against Prayer, as inconsistent with God's foreknowledge. It may suffice to say that He foreknows Prayer itself, as well as any other means we may take to an end, and that we might as well neglect sowing and expect to reap, as neglect Prayer and expect a blessing. The question how far we may assure ourselves of an answer to Prayer is a more practical one, and presents some little difficulty.

This however must be evident : that God does not place His omnipotence at the beck of erring man, and that no reasonable being could wish Him to do so. The Prayers He promises to hear

are the Prayers of His faithful people, and He promises to hear them for their good. Nor is it against this that he sometimes hears a Prayer to the chastisement of the person who makes it. For that may be his way of amending the folly that thinks it can judge for itself what is needful. It is enough for us to know that Prayer is a real mean towards attaining what we wish, just as a child's request is a mean towards obtaining anything from a parent, but always subject to that parent's judgment. "*If he ask an egg will he offer him a scorpion?*"<sup>1</sup> and that God is pleased that we should ask, and always answers with a real benefit such Prayers as are made in a right and dutiful spirit. And it is a good test of our desires, to think whether they will bear to be turned into Prayers.

From these considerations it will follow that our petitions ought to be particular, and especially that we ought to make use of Prayer as an effectual means of attaining those graces of which we stand most in need for ourselves, as well as of furthering our work for the benefit of others, or helping those whom we cannot help by any direct exertions. The benefit of this is matter of faith, but the repeated precepts and promises of Holy Scripture do not leave it a matter of doubt to the

<sup>1</sup> S. Luke xi. 12.

believer, and he may give himself heartily to the work of pleading to God for such things as are for the furtherance of His Kingdom, with the full assurance that he is really effecting what he desires.\*

Under the Gospel we have less occasion to Pray for temporal blessings than was the case under the Law. Yet we ought to Pray for them so far as we strive after them, and when we wish for them without Praying for them, the reason for doing so ought to be our trust in God that He will do what is best for us, whether He grant them or not. Too many wish for them without Praying for them, either because they are ashamed to Pray for them, or because they are not in the habit of feeling that Prayer is likely to be answered. It may be a sign of a carnal state to pray much for temporal things, but it is a sign of an unbelieving state to care much about them and never pray for them. “*Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*”†

However it is better that our Prayers should be spent chiefly on spiritual blessings, and on those which we are most sure are according to God’s Will. We need not fear that we are

\* 1 S. John v. 14, 15.

† Phil. iv. 6.

erring when we Pray for the increase of our love to God and man, for mastery over our own inclinations, for help against temptation, for mindfulness of God, for wisdom, for greater fear of displeasing God, for peace, for pardon of past sins, for the good of our neighbour, and the like. Even these things we must be content to receive in His own time, and in His own measure, but we may be confident that such petitions are not presumptuous, and that in them we only ask what He has bid us ask, that when we receive it we may know from Whom we have received it.

As for spiritual comforts, we may lawfully desire and ask for them, but if we desire our own greatest perfection we shall ask them with absolute submission, seeing that they are not always good for us. And even with respect to knowledge of the truth, and guidance in difficulties, we have one very important rule to observe, which is too seldom insisted on, and far too little observed. We must not insist on an *immediate* answer. Doubt may be the very discipline provided for us, even during a long period; and we may have to make up our minds as to what is the most dutiful course in uncertainty, before we obtain that clear sight which enables us to discern what is actually true. The consideration of this rule will go far toward solving that very common

difficulty, "How is it that two pious men Pray for guidance on the same point, and come to opposite conclusions?" If one of them be even a little *impatient*, the difficulty is done away. Of course there are other moral faults which may likewise affect the case, but this bears on it most directly. If your difficulty continues, walk on in the path of duty, (and you may generally discern what is your duty *while in doubt*,) and Pray still for direction. Great is the peace which some have obtained in this way after long waiting, and far better than that forced and unreal, though but too pleasant, calm, which is attained by a bold and hasty decision.

Petitions should, in general, be brief, and plainly expressed. Many words often amuse the mind rather than engage the heart. The form of Collects or Litanies is the most suitable for stated Devotion, and most readily admits of adaptation to particular circumstances, and of the introduction of additional matter. Longer Prayers may be of good use occasionally, when it is an object to keep the mind dwelling on some one point for a length of time. But in ordinary Devotion, where many things are to be mentioned in a short space, and where great *power* of attention cannot be reckoned upon, the more broken form is by far the best.

A still shorter form of petition is of very great use for times when we cannot kneel down to Prayer. In the very midst of our secular occupations we may have occasion to cry for help against some powerful temptation, or to send up to God some longing desire which is strongly awakened in our minds. For this purpose it is well to have some very short and marked expressions, stored in our memory, which may readily occur to us as they are wanted, especially against sudden temptations. The same indeed may be said of Praise and Thanksgiving, the occasions of which may often occur when they can only be offered mentally, and in an ejaculatory form.

The Psalms abound in such sentences, as well as in longer portions, which may be adopted as our own Prayers for the same blessings which the Psalmist asked, or others analagous to them. And it may almost be made a test of the rightness of any of our wishes, whether it will come under any of the petitions of that Prayer which our Lord has taught us. That Prayer was emphatically called by Christians of old "The Prayer," and they would always begin their Devotions with it, and their instruction with respect to Prayer always turned much on the explanation of its meaning. If nothing else will come into our minds, they ought at least to dwell upon it,

and throw themselves with all the force they can into each of its petitions. Whoever has well learned that Prayer is great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

## VI.

**On Intercession.**

No careful reader of the New Testament can fail to be struck with the frequent mention of the duty of Intercession, and the importance attached to it. We are commanded to pray for our enemies, and to make supplications for all men, and for kings<sup>u</sup> and all that are in authority, and for those who labour in the Gospel,<sup>x</sup> and for those whom we see fall into a sin not unto death.<sup>y</sup> And S. Paul especially asks for the Prayers of others as great and important means of attaining success in his labours for the cause of Christ, and often speaks of his own earnest prayers for them. Corresponding to this we find the practice and feeling of the earliest Saints and Martyrs, and of Holy Men in all ages. S. Ignatius, going to Martyrdom, asks the prayers of his brethren.<sup>z</sup> S. Polycarp, shortly before his sufferings, names a large number of persons in his Prayers.<sup>a</sup> But indeed it would be endless to give instances, for

<sup>u</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.    <sup>x</sup> Eph. vi. 18, 19.    <sup>y</sup> 1 S. John v. 16.

<sup>z</sup> Epistle to the Romans, § iii. Abp. Wake's Translation of the Apostolical Fathers.

<sup>a</sup> Epistle to the Church of Smyrna concerning the Martyrdom of S. Polycarp, § viii. ib.

almost every life of any holy man, of whom we know anything beyond his name, would show that Intercession has been the cherished practice of the people of Christ, (observe particularly the example of Job, c. i. 5, and xlii. 10,) both in public and in private Devotion, from the very first. And Holy Scripture leaves no room for us to doubt its efficacy, as the Psalmist says of his intercession for the unworthy, "*my Prayer returned into mine own bosom.*"<sup>b</sup> Nor of its being our bounden duty, as Samuel says to the ungrateful people, "*God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.*"<sup>c</sup>

Most persons of any seriousness probably practice this more or less, but some have a difficulty in not knowing what to ask for others, or how best to remember them in Prayer. Or the first point we need not be anxious, for we may simply pray to God to bless them, and to grant what is best for them, and He will measure His blessing by our earnestness and faith rather than by our knowledge. Yet there is no presumption in praying for their enlightenment if we know them to be in sin or error, for their relief (as it shall please Him) if they are in any kind of distress, for their protection from temptation, for their growth in Grace, for their success, if so it may

<sup>b</sup> Ps. xxxv. 13.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Sam. xii. 23.

be, in good endeavours. In ordinary cases it will be sufficient to name the person in the proper place in a general Prayer, and many may be named together if the Prayer is suitably framed. Indeed most persons cannot habitually pray for very many in any other way. There are very many petitions in the Litany, &c., which may suggest proper forms for this purpose.

Such prayers may be either daily, or periodical, according to opportunities, though each person will have some relatives and friends for whom he ought to pray every day.

Also on special occasions it is often well to use a particular Prayer for this and that person, as being sick, afflicted, or in danger, or travelling by land or sea, or as at some great turning-point of life, as Confirmation and first Communion, entering on a trade or profession, going first from home, or receiving Holy Orders, entering upon an office, in doubt about future destination, &c.

Sometimes, if the heart is full, and if you have not found the practice lead you to any irreverence, it may be well to frame your petition on the moment, and speak to your Heavenly Father freely as you think. Only this kind of Prayer must be made with much watchfulness, lest you give vent to your own wilful, or discontented, or fondly ambitious, or earthly, or otherwise un-

worthy feelings. God loves a pure offering, and will have us at least take such care as we may that ours be so, though He is merciful in regard to our simplicity, and the infirmities we cannot avoid. Much may depend on what we ask, both for ourselves and for those we love. The safe side is the side of Faith. Do not forbear to ask anything from a doubt of the efficacy of Prayer, nor so ask any particular thing, as if you knew better what were good for your friend than He Who seems to withhold it.

Do not pledge yourself lightly to pray for this or that person, especially before you know whether you will stand in any permanent relation to him. Even the Prayers occasioned by a transient intimacy may not be unfruitful, but if they are continued amongst many other Intercessions, when there is no longer any intercourse, the thing may become unmeaning. Yet it is well to keep some record of persons whom one has so known, and to pray for them at times. Perhaps, for instance, we may be enabled in that way to requite a benefactor who has himself long since forgotten us.

The Devotions of Bishop Andrewes shew that he continued long to pray for places and persons with whom he had been connected. It was said of one good man that it was worth while to do

him an injury to gain the benefit of his Prayers. All who have enemies should have a place in their Prayers for them, and indeed for less than enemies, even for all who give them annoyance and discomfort. Nothing tends more to check any unchristian feeling. Those who co-operate in any good work may often do well to pray especially for one another. And those who are members in common of any family, society, or corporate body, would do well to pray for each other, that their union may be blessed and made an instrument of good, and that they may each and all be strengthened to labour for the glory of God.

The members of a family, especially, should take care to keep up this bond amongst themselves, however they may be separated, and to meet often in the House of their Father, Who is in Heaven. This they may realize more fully in private Prayer, so far as concerns giving time and attention to the thought, while, on the other hand, it may be more strongly felt in public worship, from the almost visible unity of Christian congregations throughout the world. In the Holy Communion, though our Intercession is universal, yet there is no reason why we may not plead the All-sufficient Sacrifice, especially in behalf of those we love. The thought of them may help us in extending our charity to other brethren,

seeing that most of us are too weak in faith to derive our love of the brethren simply and wholly from that of our Heavenly Father.

And no one ought to think himself too mean to pray for others. For every one may lawfully wish good for them, though it be good far beyond his own reach, and every one may lawfully prefer his own requests at the Throne of Grace, and that in such manner that his asking for another is no hindrance to his asking for himself. Thus S. Paul asks the Prayers of his converts, even<sup>d</sup> when he has lately had to find fault with them. And the weak should know that the strong often have conflicts proportioned to their strength, and may at least gain the greater victories for the Prayers of those who are far their inferiors. . Certain it is that some of those whom we have reason to believe to be amongst the greatest and holiest of mankind, have been most earnest in begging for the Prayers of others, and that apparently not as a mere form, or as only thinking it right to do so, but from a deep and pressing sense of need.

<sup>d</sup> 2 Cor. i. 11. (Not in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, or in that to the Galatians, where the evil was not yet corrected.)

## VII.

**On Acts of Faith, Contrition, &c.**

MOST writers on Devotion recommend, and it seems rightly, the bringing the mind at times to certain *Acts*, as of Faith, Charity, Contrition, Resignation.

This would be done, of course, more or less in the serious and thoughtful use of ordinary Prayers, and other forms of Devotion, the Lord's Prayer itself containing the most necessary acts of the soul toward God. But it is usual in books of Devotion to give also forms of words for each single act, so that it may be attended to at leisure, and not merely in passing, and may thus become more definite and complete.

This practice is especially useful where there is an inclination to be slack in any particular. For instance, a thoughtless mind may, with great profit, be brought to an Act of Faith, one that dwells upon quarrels and injuries, to an Act of Charity, and the like.

A doubting mind may sometimes be relieved by an Act of Faith, but one caution is needed in that case. The Act of Faith requires a pre-sup-

posed relation to Him Whom you believe ; and a Psalm, or the Lord's Prayer, said with all the earnestness you can command, or rather can beg from Heaven at the moment, will afford a better vantage-ground for the act than any mere resolution of your own. It will put you in a right position towards God, and you will see in it that He has given you words that shew the way to Him. No proof from external evidences goes thus at once to the heart.

The Act of Charity is most helped by reflecting on the love of God, in Christ, toward man, and on our own unworthiness of it.

The Act of Contrition may be helped by a review of past sin, but ought to be chiefly founded on the thought of our Christian privileges, and what we ought to be, as members of Christ and children of God.

The Act of Resignation is most effectually aided by distinct meditation on the Sufferings of our Lord, although there are many considerations of reason, with respect to our own ignorance, the wisdom and justice of God, and the benefits of trouble in this life, which ought to convince us of the duty. But the thought of our Suffering Lord and Saviour more forcibly touches the heart, and commands the will as well as convinces the judgment.

The Act of Hope is one which ought not to be neglected, and which holds too little place in ordinary practice. It is a difficult one, because we do not easily feel hope for things we cannot distinctly imagine. And when we try to think of a future state, our notions are vague and impalpable. Perhaps the two points we can be most sure of, and on which, therefore, we can most distinctly fix our hopes, are the absence of sin, and the sensible Presence of our Lord. And although it is impossible for us perfectly to apprehend and realize this Presence, yet we may form some notion of it through reading His Words and reviewing His Actions, and thinking that it is the Same Person Whom we are to see face to Face, and even as He is, when He comes again.

When our Devotions incline to dulness and slackness, it is of great use to take up some point in which we are particularly wanting, and resolve to bring ourselves to a distinct act of the disposition which we need. For we must educate ourselves so far as we understand our own state and character ; and we know well how important it is in education to bring a child to do, be it but the very least act, in a direction opposite to its prevailing faults. An act of submission is a victory won against pride, an act of forgiveness is a victory against anger, and the like.

And these acts of mind, duly practised, tend to give a seriousness and an animation to our Devotions, which we may lose if we fall into habits of mere recitation, or even of mere intellectual exercise, in which the will takes no distinct part.

Special Acts are also useful in fixing the results of reading and meditation, and the latter especially requires something of the kind to give it practical force. The concluding act should be adapted to the subject of meditation, as we shall have to observe more at length under that head.

## VIII.

## On Commemoration.

THERE are many things which we do well to remember especially before God, either frequently or periodically, as the case may be. And it is a help toward living as in His Sight, if we make a religious Commemoration of some of the chief objects of our interest. The Church sets us the example of this practice in her Festivals and Fasts, commemorative of events in the history of our Lord, and of his Saints. And Patriarchs and Holy Men of old used the like custom both with respect to times and places ; building an altar in memory of some solemn event, or sanctifying a day to be kept by themselves and their posterity. One such festival of human<sup>e</sup> institution, besides those which rested on a Divine appointment, is recorded as having been observed by our Lord Himself. And the most sacred act of our religion is expressly commanded by Him to be done in *remembrance* of Himself.

Of course all private and voluntary Commemorations must be kept to their own place, and not

<sup>e</sup> S. John x. 22.

allowed to usurp a dignity and rank above what belongs to them. They are to be regarded as means helpful toward sanctifying a portion of our lives, and as affording opportunities and mementos for special intercessions, thanksgivings, or it may be humiliations.

They should not be multiplied, especially with any binding resolution, beyond what is reasonably easy and natural for us to observe. Indeed a very few years experience will convince most men that they do not know at any given time either what will be, or what ought to be, their feelings on many subjects a year or two later. Still a Commemoration thoughtfully observed may link together our earlier and our later days, in a way very serviceable to our growth in piety and wisdom.

They may regard ourselves, our friends, or the Church at large, according to our circumstances and dispositions ; but that which takes the chief place in our interest and attention seems to have a kind of claim to be most especially commemorated before God. Our Birth, Baptism, deliberate Repentance, Confirmation, first Communion, or other chief events of our own lives ; the death of a friend, or any great events, as above mentioned, in his life ; the Consecration of a Church in which we are interested, an Ordination, or

other event concerning the Church, may give occasion to a profitable religious remembrance throughout a lifetime.

The manner of Commemoration is various. It may be by merely introducing into our Prayers the mention of the particular event or person concerned, or it may be by using special Psalms or Collects for the occasion. Sometimes it may be of use to throw the thoughts of some eventful day into a Prayer, to be used afterward frequently, or on the return of the same day of the week, month, or year. This has been recommended by more than one religious writer, and is an excellent practice, at least as regards the more important events of our spiritual life. It is much better, certainly, than merely writing down our feelings and thoughts for our own amusement, or supposed instruction, provided, at least, that we do it with that seriousness which such an act ought, in the nature of things, to carry with it, and the care to say nothing before God but what is according to His Will. Persons who do not find it easy to compose new Prayers for their own use, may, on such occasions, select some suitable Psalm, or a Collect of the Church, or a Prayer of some approved author, which may express the awakened feeling of the time better than anything they could themselves have writ-

ten, and may be afterwards used by them with that additional understanding and concurrence of will which result from a special application of the words to their own case, or to an event in which they have had some share.

It is not meant to insist on this as an *essential* part of Devotion, but only to give some notion of the manner of doing it, to any one who may be desirous to do it, while he scarcely knows how. But the use of it extends far beyond its seeming application, as our practices of Devotion do, in fact, grow up very much by means of the efforts we are induced to make at particular times, by circumstances which impress or arouse us.

## IX.

**On the Use of Holy Scripture.**

THE devotional reading of Holy Scripture is a duty which no Christian, who is able to read, ought to neglect. The excuses for so doing are various, but the true cause is, almost universally, indolence, or such engagement in worldly concerns as is really hurtful to the spiritual life. If any one thinks he knows the Bible so well that such reading is unnecessary to him, he only shews that he does not know the true use of the Bible. For if he even knew it by heart throughout, he might still profitably converse with it, and would delight to do so if he at all rightly appreciated it. In fact those who best know the Word of God, are most aware that they gain new and improved thoughts every time they give their minds to the study of it.

We will not here say anything of critical study, which, though most useful in itself, is not strictly a part of Devotion. Our object is that Devotional or practical study, which is within the reach of the simple, and which ought on no account to be neglected by the critical scholar, though his intel-

lectual habits are very apt to tempt him to pass it by.

Every day, then, should the Christian in this way converse with God. Best if he can find time to do it before he goes forth into the world. It is indeed more essential that he should pray at this time, than that he should read, and God, no doubt, will speak inwardly to the soul that comes humbly before Him, though it be precluded from the opportunity of listening then to His written Word. But where it may be, at least some small portion of Holy Scripture should be thoughtfully read in the commencement of our day, and listened to by the soul as the voice of God. Many, too, could find a clear time in the evening for the same purpose, if they duly valued it.

The portions thus read should generally be short, and persons who read the Morning and Evening Services of the Church early and late in their own private Devotions, would do well to read the Lessons, not only with a general attention to the whole, but with a certain closer and more vigorous attention to some particular part in them, or some particular truth insisted on in them, such as could not be applied in so short a time to the whole lesson or the whole subject.

There is nothing unreasonable in reading repeatedly the same passage. For instance, the

Epistle or Gospel for a Sunday might be read over with profit every day in the following week. Rightly used, the repetition would only impress it more forcibly on the mind, and bring out fresh truth, or old truth with fresh distinctness, every time.

Those who have the Morning and Evening Service of the Church within reach during the day, may very properly prefer some slower reading of Holy Scripture for their private Devotions. And they need not think much of giving several months to the devout reading of a single book, taking a few verses at a time, and reflecting on them carefully.

Or, again, a character, or a subject, may be taken instead of a book. Only that in doing this some care is required lest we throw aside everything in Holy Writ that does not seem to suit our own fancies, and pick and choose out of it too much according to our taste or theory. Especially we should be on our guard in such reading against the notion of making discoveries, and setting ourselves up as wiser than the Church of God. Caution is requisite even in making use of the suggestions of others, who appear to have a very powerful apprehension of any particular truth. The Church is wiser and better balanced in her thoughts than each one of us. Yet such

suggestions may be of great value, and are not to be despised or neglected, unless we perceive that they depart from the analogy of the Faith, or that the authors of them set themselves above the Church, or hold loosely by her Communion.

Sometimes, again, it is very useful to read rapidly. And if we are giving any length of time to Devotional exercises, it is often a good thing to take a book or large portion of Holy Scripture to employ the spare time between hours of Prayer, and to make it a kind of Paradise to walk in, while we are obliged to intermit the severer exercises of meditation, and the like. This way opens the most wonderful prospects to the mind, and is very likely to give to any one who tries it a wholly new conception of the beauty and symmetry of the written Word.

It is evident that the full meaning of Holy Scripture can never be understood by taking very small portions at a time, unless pains are also taken to combine those portions, and to apprehend their connection, and their import when taken together. Nor should this combination be confined to critical study, as it requires no less exercise of the will and affections than the apprehension of the Divine meaning in a single passage.

Even an imperfect *plan* of reading will be of

use, as it will both help to secure your reading, and determine the mind to more ready and decided action upon what is read, than would be likely to accompany a desultory and indeterminate application. In commencing this it will be well to form a plan for a short period, for the next week or month, or till such a book is finished, and to keep to it for that time, though it may be found imperfect, and at the end of such limited time to form another. Regularity, and going through what we have laid down beforehand, is very desirable in Devotion, and tends strongly to fix the habit of reverence and dutifulness, besides that it almost always implies a certain degree of self-denial.

A right apprehension of the force of Holy Scripture is a great gift, to be sought from God by earnest Prayer. And it is well to enter upon your reading always with Prayer, and frequently to turn your thoughts in that direction, seeking to have the truth which is before you deeply fixed in your mind by the Holy Spirit, Whose words you are reading. And if you find any particular portion of Scripture afford you little profit when you first study it, do not let yourself suppose that it must always be so, but rather return to it after some time, and try to see what is the true use and purpose of it.

Above all, do not neglect the most simple and clear statements of Holy Scripture, as though you understood them too well to profit by them any farther. For many of them contain those very truths with which it is most important that we should converse. And after we have learned the rudiments of Christian Faith, we need not be always seeking new knowledge, but should rather seek to know rightly what we have already learned. This we are most likely to accomplish by reading frequently and thoughtfully the very passages which contain the plainest truths.

Besides, although we have a general notion of the meaning of such words as "Life," "Light," "Grace," "Faith," "Peace," and the like, we may be very far from fully apprehending what is expressed by them in the language of the Spirit, and may want many a devout meditation on them, as they occur in the Word of God, before they come to awake in our minds the ideas which properly belong to them.

The services of the Church will be a guide to your first attempts at adapting your Devotional reading to the course of the Christian year, which you ought to do at least so far as to take notice of the times devoted to the commemoration of the chief events in the History of our Blessed Lord. Only, as has before been said, it is gene-

rally best to take a shorter portion for any given day than the Lessons read in our service. And in the Holy Week, though some may be able to follow the Gospels for the days throughout, others may find it more profitable to take only a few verses at a time for their closer and more meditative reading, or even at times to take some portion of a Prophecy, or an Epistle, bearing on the same subject, for this purpose, instead of the actual narrative. This, however, should be always borne in mind, that as the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ is the chief end of Holy Writ, so the actual teaching concerning His Person, and the record of His Words and Deeds, is the central part, to which all the rest is more or less subordinate.

## X.

*On Reading in General.*

ALTHOUGH no other books can be compared to the Holy Scriptures in respect of their authority, and none ought to be allowed to displace them from our reading, yet it is not to be imagined that the power of writing was given in vain to successive generations, or that it was to be without its exercise in producing helps to Devotion and Christian practice.

The Religion of Christ is the same in all ages, and therefore needed only to be recorded once for all, but the occasions of its application to life and practice are manifold, and it has pleased God to leave the use of these for the trial and exercise of Christians from age to age. It is not anything new and artificial, then, that we are to seek in Devotional Reading, but rather such arrangements, combinations, and applications of old truth as may help to fix it in our minds more firmly, and to diffuse its influence through our lives.

Some portion of the Sunday, at least, could be given by most people to this kind of reading, in addition to that which they give to the Holy Scriptures themselves. And on other days few

are so engaged, at least all the year round, but that they could find time for a short chapter of practical or Devotional matter, and give it sufficient attention to draw much profit from it.

Various kinds of books may be thus used. Sermons are suitable for times when we are sufficiently at leisure to read one attentively through at once, and when we wish to combine instruction, more or less, with practical edification. Short religious poems admit of a more desultory use, and may be taken up at odd times, the hold they take on the imagination compensating for the disadvantage of surrounding distractions. Books of practical reflections, especially such as are divided into short chapters, may be conveniently used, by saving a small portion of time for them, in connection with our regular Devotions, or at some time of the day when we can be quiet for a little while. Thus a few minutes daily would soon take you through such a book as Thomas à Kempis on "The Imitation of Christ," and perhaps with great profit. Biographies, with few exceptions, come rather under the head of ordinary than of Devotional reading, but those of eminently holy men may be taken into connection with Devotion, where there is sufficient time for using them. Some practical treatises, which are not arranged for short daily readings, may be

studied, with great advantage, by assigning them half an hour or an hour at a time, if possible, at regular intervals. Such books as Taylor's "Holy Living" and "Holy Dying" ought to be read in this way; but sooner than leave a very good and important book unread, it may be well to divide it as best you may, and take such portions at a time as you can. Only in dealing so with such books as the last-mentioned, it is but fair to yourself and the writer to take a moment at the commencement of each reading to recollect where you are, and to delay your finishing the books in order to further your mastering them. Books of meditations may also be used in the same way as those of practical reflections, though they have another and more complete use, which is more properly their own, and which belongs to the head of Meditation.

Many persons almost wholly neglect this kind of reading, from a notion that it will do them but little good, and that they could any how accomplish but so little of it that it would be hardly worth while. This is a very great mistake, for Satan and the world will not be slow to fill up the intervals of time which are naturally capable of such use, and, on the other hand, if well used, they would, at last, accumulate effects of no small value. One good book, fairly known,

even as it would be by three months' reading, at five minutes a day, is a great possession, and may prove a resource in calamity or sickness, or a support in trying circumstances of daily life, far beyond what careless readers suppose.

The great error of modern reading is *inattention*. We are apt to read in order to be amused, or to search for something new to gratify us for the moment, rather than in order to occupy our minds with the whole subject concerned, and to secure our hold of it. It is well worth while, then, to be careful in the selection of our reading, not despising a book because it is a common one ; (really some people seem to think they know enough of a book when they know that it is accounted a good one, and what is its subject ;) nor grasping at great numbers and variety, but taking up what we are assured, by competent advisers or by a partial examination, is, on the whole, good and valuable, and then to *read through* what we have chosen, carefully, and perhaps even repeatedly. It is often of very great use to know where to find matter suited to a particular occasion, or for the reading of a person under particular circumstances, for the sake of others as well as of ourselves. And the writings of holy men, read in the way above suggested, become to us a kind of friends and counsellors.

## XI.

## On Meditation.

THIS is, to most minds, by far the most difficult of all the practices of Devotion, and perhaps there are some who cannot, even in a length of time, attain to such an independent exercise of thought as to be able to Meditate steadily on a given subject for half an hour, without external helps. All, however, should make some attempts to attain what they can in this holy exercise, and every one may, at least in some of its easier forms, practice it with advantage.

Those who are able, find it of very great use to spend some time even every morning in Meditating on some sacred subject, such as an event in the Life of our Lord, a Doctrine of Religion, a special point of Christian Virtue, Death, the Last Judgment, and the like. In order to which, it is necessary to have the subject fixed beforehand, and to use a certain orderly way of proceeding, fixing the posture or determining the action of the body so as not to interrupt thought, seeking a blessing on the Meditation, by an act of prayer, at its commencement, bringing the imagination

into order, by occupying it with suitable objects, distributing the particular subject of thought under proper heads, and then dwelling on them, one after another, with an exercise of the will and affections, and, finally, collecting the whole powers of the soul into a solemn act of adoration to Almighty God, as He has been pleased to manifest Himself in the truth which has been contemplated. Few, however, are able to do this steadily and effectually, without the help of some book of Meditations, to suggest matter of thought, which they may read, if that is sufficient, the night before, and then, in the morning Meditation, recall the principal topics to their mind. Or the same may be done with short and well chosen passages of Holy Scripture.

Some, however, are hardly equal even to this exertion, and would do better to take a book in hand at the time, and think over it; or to turn their reading of Holy Scripture into a Meditation, by taking time to reflect closely upon what they read. The practice of forming moral reflections upon the objects that happen to come before us, is highly recommended by Boyle, and exemplified in his "Occasional Reflections," many of which give a very profitable turn to events otherwise indifferent.

There is also a kind of Meditation which all

may practice more or less, and which is of great importance to our spiritual progress. It may be used in walking, or even at a mechanical employment, and consists in choosing out some truth of Religion, and striving to fix the mind upon it, in such a way as to obtain a more lively apprehension of it, just as a person might think of anything he had to learn, or any piece of work he had to accomplish. It may seem but little that is done each time we set ourselves to such Meditation, but the practice of it will edify us by little and little, and make us ready in applying our knowledge of Divine things to matters of daily life, as well as expert in judging of the bearings of Religious truth and the meanings of Holy Scripture. Every one who knows the Lord's Prayer, the Belief, and the Commandments, has a fund of knowledge with which he can begin upon such Meditation. Let him only set himself seriously to consider what we mean when we call God our Father, beginning with a prayer that he may be enabled to think aright, and ending by lifting up his heart to God, as apprehended in that near and endearing relation, and he will have a sufficient and profitable occupation for his mind, not once only, but many times over. And he may do nearly the same with the words "Which art in Heaven," or "Thy will be done,"

and the rest of the clauses in the Lord's Prayer, and with any portion of the Apostle's Creed, and many parts of the Ten Commandments; and when these are exhausted, Holy Scripture will furnish subjects which may be easily selected by a mind so far practised in the work.

The Passion of our Lord is the great historical subject of Meditation, and one which no Christian ought to neglect. Besides the Gospel narratives themselves, there are abundant helps provided for this subject. And it may be very profitable at times to follow out the hint given in the rubric, (taken from an ancient source), in the Service for the Visitation of the Sick, which suggests to those who have not the opportunity of actually communicating, that they may do so at least in spirit. It is a help to our Meditation on our Lord's Passion to join ourselves in spirit with those who are actually celebrating His own Memorial of it, whether at the sick bed or in Church, and to seek a spiritual participation of its blessed fruits.

Perhaps the difficulty of Meditation consists chiefly in the steadiness of purpose it requires, and the entire freedom from interruption which it is necessary to secure, in order to conducting it properly. And much of the benefit of it, no doubt, is connected with these same require-

ments ; for such an exertion for a purely religious purpose cannot be without its profit, as a moral discipline, independently of the actual work accomplished.

Every one ought, at least occasionally, to do his best in the way of Meditation, and those who have not the leisure or the courage to undertake it daily, may, at least, attempt it in preparation for the Holy Communion, or at the more solemn seasons of the Christian year. It would be well to begin with some limited plan, such as a series of Meditations on the Lord's Prayer, or on the Four Last Things, and to profit by experience in determining any rule for general use.

It may be worth while here to notice a practice recommended by S. François de Sales, in his "Introduction to a Devout Life," which is allied to Meditation, and would, at some times, supply the place of it. He recommends an effort of recollection, at the end of the morning's Devotions, gathering up the most valuable thoughts that have suggested themselves, into what he calls a "Spiritual Posy,"<sup>f</sup> to be borne about with us all day, and to refresh us with its Heavenly scents in the midst of our occupations.

Those who cannot succeed even with this, may accomplish some part of the ends of Meditation,

<sup>f</sup> The thought may be from S. Chrysostom. On Stat. Hom. vi.

by the thoughtful use of written Meditations and of select portions of Holy Scripture. In order to do this, they must take somewhat more time than is necessary for merely reading over the allotted portion, and must endeavour to dwell upon it with all the faculties of their minds. They must endeavour to bring the matter clearly before their understanding, and then to apply their affections to that which they have been considering, and to form those determinations of will which rightly follow from it.

Some exercise of this kind is almost absolutely necessary for all who would live by faith; and though some may have done so who have not consciously practised it, yet those very persons have been really meditative Christians, for their minds have been occupied with Divine things, from the hold they had on their hopes and affections, though they may not have deliberately and of set purpose engaged themselves with such thoughts under the name of Meditations.

## XII.

**On Self-examination.**

It is hardly possible to maintain a life of Christian obedience, not to say watchfulness, without frequently making an effort to examine ourselves, and see what we are doing. This is rather a difficult duty to perform well, but not so difficult as to be out of the reach of any, and it is so absolutely necessary to your safety, that you will do well to consider how you may be able to practise it most effectually, and not to shrink from any little effort that may be required.

Now it is very evident that if something is not done in this way every day, a great part of your life will slip by unregarded and unwatched ; and yet most people find themselves utterly unable to go carefully through a long string of questions every evening. The attempt rather distracts them, and inclines them to dulness in the whole of their Devotions. And yet Self-examination must be particular and searching, or we are very likely to be fatally deceived. What, then, is to be done ?

The work must be simplified, or it cannot be

done, or at least, by most people, will not be done at all. And a little practical consideration does simplify it very much.

In the first place, a string of questions comprising a general summary of the Christian code is suitable for the examination of our whole life, or of a considerable portion of it at a time, and we cannot well conduct such an examination without it; but a single day may be reviewed in a different manner, provided that we are already on the watch against our most prevalent faults, and know where to look for them. In order to this it is clear that we must first try to review our whole past life, so as to find out where we stand at present, and then our work from day to day becomes very much shorter and easier, and within the compass of a moderate effort.

Of reviewing the whole past life, something has been said already under the head of Confession. It may be worth while to add here some rules for conducting the work. It must be undertaken very solemnly, with prayer and resolution, that you may make it complete, and hide nothing from the light. Then take period after period of your life, as you can most easily divide it, and go through each period with reference to the various duties arranged under the heads of the Ten *Commandments*, or otherwise, as you may have them,

and mark strictly every wilful departure from the rule of right that you can detect, endeavouring also to ascertain in what respects you have most wilfully chosen your own will against the known will of God, and what are the faults that have the most habitual hold upon you, and what the wrong inclinations which you find it most difficult to subdue.

When you have once fairly accomplished such an examination, and closed it with a solemn confession to Almighty God, and if need be to His Minister, renouncing the evil for the future, and choosing the good for your portion, you will find what remains much easier to you.

It may then suffice for *daily* Examination, to collect yourself for a short time at your evening Devotions, and try if you can recollect anything done wrong in the day, especially anything wilful, and to add an especial question or two on the head of your most besetting sin, whatever it may be. If you do this seriously and thoughtfully, great matters, at least, are not likely to pass unnoticed. You would do well to note down the chief faults you find from day to day, and sum up your examination at the end of the week, enquiring afresh into any point which you may have reason to think has been passed over too slightly.

Then in preparation for the Holy Communion,

or at any periodical seasons of especial Devotion, you would do well again to look back over a considerable period of time, especially all that has past since a former general Examination, and to enquire closely whether any evil or dangerous habit has been growing upon you unawares, or whether any single act of great wilfulness has remained unrepented.

This will be altogether a work of some labour, but not more than is really necessary, and not more than an ordinary person can very well accomplish, if he is only well convinced that it is the most important thing in his whole life to keep a clear conscience toward God and man.

The great thing is to strive that your Examination may be fruitful, and that a sin detected may not be allowed to remain. Many have rooted out evil habits, one by one, by acting vigorously on the results of a special Examination on the head of their besetting sins, so as, by God's blessing, to effect an almost entire change of character, and to subdue faults that once seemed to belong to their very nature.

## XIII.

## On Fasting.

“*THE kingdom of God is not meat and drink,*”<sup>c</sup> but it does regulate the use of meat and drink to godly purposes, and especially to that of spiritual exercise. Our Lord has distinctly foretold that His disciples would Fast, has promised a reward to Fasting, when practised toward God, and not for man’s praise, and has declared that certain powers of evil are not likely to be overcome without it.

An argument against it has been founded, strangely enough, on a passage of S. Paul, in which it is, in fact, recommended. “*Refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself unto godliness ; for bodily exercise (γυμνασία) profiteth little ; (Greek ‘for a little’) but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*”<sup>d</sup> In which the meaning is not to condemn Fasting, which we know S. Paul practised, nor to compare godliness with the superstitious abstinences spoken of above, which were not profitable even

<sup>c</sup> Rom. xiv. 17.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

“for a little while,” (such is the unquestionable meaning of the original), but to compare exercises of a spiritual kind, and tending to godliness, such as are Fasting and Prayer, with exercises of the body, for the body’s sake, such as every Greek was familiar with. The abstinences here and elsewhere blamed, were of a different character, founded on notions of uncleanness in certain meats, &c., and have nothing to do with the temporary forbearance of using things lawful in themselves for spiritual exercise.

We may learn, however, from such passages of Holy Scripture not to attach an undue importance to the outward act of Fasting in itself, but to regard it as subservient to that godliness, for the sake of which it is practised. And we must keep it within such limits as are serviceable to that end, and take especial care not to let anything we do betray us into spiritual pride, like the Pharisee, who spoiled his good work by boasting of it.

Entire abstinence, at least from solid food, till evening, and using then only the poorer kinds of it, is the complete Fast, but this is out of the power of most persons in our climate, at least for any number of days. Abstinence, as distinguished from Fasting, is forbearing the use of *particular kinds* of food, especially meat, through-

out the day. Of course either of these is rendered nugatory by any attempt to combine indulgence of the palate with it, though some little relief may be necessary at times, in order to maintain a healthy appetite.

It is best for those who have any doubts and scruples on the subject of Fasting, to consult their spiritual Pastor, or some experienced guide, as to the rules they should adopt, and what relaxation ought to be allowed for the sake of health, as indiscreet severity often leads to very serious and even fatal illness, and, on the other hand, a weak and irregular indulgence may either prevent any effectual self-denial, or lead to perplexities that distract the mind, and go far to defeat the real object of all that is attempted.

Those who cannot bear abstinence from meat, or going for any length of time without solid food, may still deny themselves some things agreeable to the palate during the Church's seasons of Fasting, and may reduce the quantity or quality of their food, as health will bear, on the more solemn days.

Some inconvenience must be expected, in anything like strict Fasting, beyond the mere feeling of hunger and a certain degree of unfitness for any kind of hard labour, bodily or mental. Rules ought to be relaxed for necessary labours, and

those which can be removed to other times should not be undertaken when the body is unfitted for them, and those pursuits should be followed which require calmness and patience, rather than strong effort.

Spiritual temptations are not unlikely to accompany Fasting, and a weak temper is very apt to be irritated when under its influence. This is not to be feared so long as it can be controlled. When it is likely to come to such an excess as really to deprive us of the power of self-command, the effect is clearly morbid, and it is much better to provide against it by some reasonable and moderate relaxation. The mere fact of some temptation occurring is no sufficient objection to Fasting. It is only what is to be expected, and part of the ordinary trial of that exercise, as we are perhaps intended to learn from our Lord's temptation coming at the end of His long Fast.

Nor, again, are we to expect any great spiritual elevation, nor must we be discouraged by a degree of dryness of spirit, such as may result from a depression of the animal powers. This is ordinary and natural, and must be expected to occur, nor does it at all indicate that the Fast is hurtful to the body, or unproductive of good to the soul. For an exercise of patience, in *connexion* with self-denial, may be of great value.

On the other hand, persons who do not experience any severe depression, or other sensible inconvenience, ought not to slight a competent medical opinion of the danger of extreme Fasting. And if, unhappily, such opinion is given them by a physician who has no sympathy for spiritual exercise, still, if the opinion is clear and decided, they ought to act upon it, till they have the opportunity of consulting a medical adviser who will make what allowance he can for religious practice, and to submit to the restraint of their wishes as a trial appointed for them. S. Paul was not one to spare the body, in the way of indulgence, but he took the pains to write especially to his disciple of the care needful for his health, and forbade a strict abstinence from wine,<sup>i</sup> when it could no longer be safely practised. And in the present improved state of medical science we must acknowledge many effects to be certainly perceptible to physicians which we cannot discern ourselves, and must acknowledge their increased skill as a gift from God to our age, which is to be used and not despised.<sup>k</sup>

<sup>i</sup> 1 Tim. v. 23.

<sup>k</sup> An experienced Physician has lately published a letter to a clergyman, "On Fasting, and the Discipline of the Body," which may be of some use even to those who wish to adhere more strictly to ancient usage than he thinks advisable. We may be thankful to see the subject approached by medical men in such a spirit as to assure us that they advise as Christians.

It is impossible to give rules for the measure of Fasting which will suit all cases ; but as self-indulgence is to be strictly watched on the one side, so it is to be remembered on the other that even the ancient ascetics have noticed the inclination of young men, eagerly taking up the practice, to carry it beyond its due limits.

Holy Scripture instructs us to avoid all moroseness and affected sadness in Fasting, but abstinence from exciting recreations, and from very light reading, is at least desirable. And, above all, it is necessary for those who are at all liable to such an error to guard against the notion that Fasting makes amends for indulged faults, so as to give any kind of license for doing wrong in the very least thing. God does not bargain with us, though He makes a covenant. His covenant is "ALL FOR ALL." He will be wholly ours, and we are to be wholly His.

## XIV.

## On Retirement.

COMMUNION with God requires the absence of distracting objects, and the exclusion of worldly cares and thoughts. This is so plain a truth that it seems hardly worth saying, and yet most of us are very slow to act upon it, and very rarely find any time perfectly free for holy purposes. The rest of the Lord's Day is an opportunity for some little withdrawal from the world, but then the public Services of the Church take up our principal energy and attention for the day, and the social or family circle, though of a sober and religious character, is not the place for the closest spiritual work.

In short, if we would know ourselves, and acquaint ourselves with God, we must find some times, at least, which we can give entirely to the work of our souls, *alone* with God. And those who cannot find time for daily or weekly Retirement, do well to take some day, or several days together, at times, for withdrawing themselves from the world, or at least, at some time of the year, to find some days together in which they can

take an hour's complete Retirement, and give themselves to self-examination, or to some sacred meditation determined beforehand, and keep themselves open to influence from Above.

Where necessity or duty compels us to live in the world, we may live in it and above it at the same time, but it is idle to talk of living above it while we wilfully immerse ourselves in the whirl of its vanities, and neglect opportunities of withdrawing from its influence. Where our heart is, there will our treasure be also ; and the heart is likely to be there, where the man dwells by choice. God has ever manifested Himself to His Saints in solitude, and even He Who was best able of all that ever walked on earth to live above the world while He seemed to live in it, went ever and anon into solitude to commune with His Father, and when His days were too laboriously occupied for time to be spared in the day, would spend the hours of night in secret prayer.

It is a safe counsel to all who desire to live a devout life, that they should seek at times the greatest degree of quiet they can obtain, that nothing may interrupt their communing with Heaven. This practice will be found of great service in enlivening your ordinary Devotions. It is like going to stay some days in the house of a friend, whom you meet indeed daily, at some

place of common resort, and see frequently at your own dwelling ; but if you go and stay a few days at his house, you contract a closer intimacy, and your ordinary meetings become more cordial, and you are surer of his sympathy, and more ready to feel with him than before.

Lent, and Advent, and the Ember Seasons, are times marked by the Church as ready for such an attempt, but if duty precludes you from using them, any opportunity of liberty may be used for an occasion of Devotional Retirement. And even if it be one of rare and brief relaxation from the cares of business, it will not be the worse if you know how to give a portion of it to calm and serious Devotion. Even days of comparative amusement will not be the less relished, nor the less conducive to health of body and mind, for an hour or two of calm Devotion in the morning. And were not this the case, so precious is Religious Retirement to the soul, that it were a good bargain to diminish worldly works and gains, and win time by the loss of them, so as to be able to have this blessing in addition to the relief needful for the body.

Those who have not the Daily Service of the Church with their ordinary occupations, find it one of the most valuable resources in a time of quiet, which they wish to employ religiously ;

and those who have it habitually, ought of course to endeavour to retain this advantage in their periods of Retirement. They may, further, use self-examination, meditation, the study of Holy Scripture, with a view to its practical and general bearings, practical books, and spiritual conference with those whom they can best trust for instruction and advice. Great care should be taken not to throw away such opportunities, for want of a regular distribution of time. Each hour should have its duty assigned, and the plan, once fairly arranged, should be kept up with diligence. In this way a few days' Retirement will often gain a step in the Spiritual Life, which is subsequently maintained to our great advantage. And it is an invaluable method of preparing for our chief undertakings, and the turning-points of our course.

## XV.

**On Published Books of Devotion.**

MOST persons who attempt a serious practice of Devotion, probably make use of some Published Forms. It will not be here attempted to state which are the best, but rather to shew how such as any one may have may be best used. However it may be well to mention, that some devout persons find the Book of Common Prayer of great service to them, as furnishing a ground-work for their private prayers, which application of it is naturally suggested by the rule of the Church, that Priests and Deacons should recite it in private, if not in public. It is, in fact, founded on the collections of Psalms, Canticles, Lessons, and Prayers, which were used principally by monastic bodies in common, and by the members of them singly when alone. The Vespers, however, were ordinarily used in public, at least on Sundays. The public Morning Service was that of the Mass, answering to our Communion Service, as completed by the actual Celebration. Part of the arrangement may perhaps be older than monasticism itself, and may have been taken

up by the monks from the earliest usage of the Church. Our Daily Prayer is compressed into two services, combining the Matins, Lauds, and Prime in the morning, and the Vespers and Compline in the evening, and omitting the mid-day services of the three hours, Terce, Sext, and None, which are given in some Primers even subsequent to the Reformation, and restored in the Devotions published by Cosin, afterwards Bishop of Durham, with the sanction of several Prelates.

Any one using the Prayer Book for Private Devotion, will have, of course, to mark the places where he has to introduce the mention of persons or objects about which he is interested. And he will very likely also have frequent occasion to insert Collects, of which he will find considerable choice, for particular mercies, or to introduce special Psalms for the circumstances of the time, or according to the Seasons of the Church.

And even if he has the Daily Service in public, he may easily take a thread to support his Devotions in private from the parts of the Morning and Evening Service, which are essential to all Prayer, and those which belong especially to morning and evening, and may substitute Collects of his own selection for the longer Prayers, and *Psalms* and portions of Scripture for private

reading, *ad libitum*. The occasional services are not to be forgotten, as supplying several most valuable Prayers for private use.

This slight sketch of the manner of using the Prayer Book, will shew how other books may be used, when we do not find it convenient to adopt them absolutely as a whole.

It is a very great mistake to wander from book to book, and to seek much variety, or even easily to let ourselves grow tired of what we use, and dissatisfied with it, and ready to change it for something else. No change should be made in these matters without a deliberate conviction that it is for the better, and *no practice either lightly adopted or lightly given up*. And it is better to go on with an imperfect book, filling up its deficiencies with Collects, or Psalms, or Prayers of our own, or from some approved writer, than to make a number of changes in search of a book that will be wholly satisfactory, which, after all, we may never find. Indeed, it would be difficult to recommend any which most persons would not find to require some additions or alterations.

Still the books we have are many of them the work of very devout and thoughtful men, and persons who have not a thoroughly established practice of their own would do well to compare

their present practice with what they might do by the help of the Prayer Book, with a view to seeing whether they cannot introduce some important improvements, such as it is likely to suggest to them.

Nothing can be more miserable than a mere parrot-like recitation from a published book, and hence some have been disposed to treat such Prayers with contempt. But those who have not a very extraordinary gift of Prayer, will certainly find that there is good to be gained from forms, if they will only take the pains to use them steadily and thoughtfully. And in general, the longer they use them the better will they find them. For the mind, when habituated to a certain course of thought, falls naturally at the appointed time into the proper position, and is ready to contemplate now its relation to God's Justice, now to His Mercies past, now to His Help needed, now to His Glory manifested, and to pour itself out in the appropriate words which are provided for it, and to attach to them, as they are now well known beforehand, the particular senses of the present occasion.

Persons concerned in education ought to be well aware of the value of fixing in the minds of the young a proper course of Prayer for morning *and evening*. It may be a stay to them under

various unforeseen circumstances, a memento of their Christianity, when they are far from the ordinary means of Grace, a memento of their Spiritual Home, if they should unhappily stray into the paths of error and sin, and a means of marking the few first steps, often too hard to find, in the path of needful repentance.

## XVI.

**On Private Forms.**

ALTHOUGH there are many very useful Forms of Devotion published for private use, still most people find it difficult to light on one perfectly suited to their own case, or at least to their own wishes. Often the defect is such as may be remedied by a few omissions and insertions, but in other cases a person may think it best to compose or compile a Book of Devotions for himself. Or such a book may grow gradually in his hands from his composing or adopting Prayers on particular occasions.

In such a work, it is of course necessary, in the first instance, to keep in view the essential parts of Devotion, and to see that none of them are neglected, and to make such an arrangement that the mind may pass naturally and easily from one to another. A certain course of Prayers should be appointed for every day, (it may very well be the same all the year round, or very slightly varied for the seasons,) with certain points marked for those duties which vary from day to day, or *for the introduction of Devotions belonging to a*

particular occasion or season. Thus, in morning Devotion, a point may be marked for forming resolutions for the day, and in evening Prayer, a proper time assigned for self-examination. The proper place should also be marked for intercession for others, so that additional names may be introduced, or Collects added, if need be, without difficulty or confusion.

Very long single Prayers, and in general anything of a wordy character, should be avoided. But, as has been already suggested, a short Prayer, embodying the feelings of any remarkable occasion, is one of the best modes of recording an event in our spiritual life, and of turning to account the impressions, which are given us, perhaps, once for all. Only it is well to remember, in composing such a Form, that it is a *Prayer*, and not to attempt to thrust everything into it, but rather to append anything that does not directly concern us in relation to God in the form of a note, or to write it in a diary, or other book for the purpose. Explicit written confessions should not be long kept by us, at least if they contain any matter that would be likely to disturb other persons in case of our death, or any other event that might throw them into other hands.

It is of great importance to have the memory well stored with such forms of Devotion as may

be of use in case of blindness coming on, or sickness disabling us from the use of ordinary helps. The former is perhaps not so common an occurrence that all would think of providing for it, though indeed very many persons' sight is more or less impaired in advanced age ; but the latter is almost sure to befall us occasionally, and very likely for some length of time before our death ; when we should naturally wish to lose no time that could be well employed. And those who have no experience of sickness may perhaps need to be told that it is often no easy matter, when the body is weak and irritated, to fix the mind for five minutes even on what we know best, much less to take a book and read. Nor can we always command the assistance of others in that way when most needed. There is one exercise, however, to which the mind is not indisposed under those circumstances. It can dwell with affection and trust on an object kept constantly before it, as on the presence of a friend ; and the thought of God may be thus realized, by thinking over words addressed to Him, or describing His Fatherly care. But those will best serve this purpose which we have engrained into our memory by constant use, and almost inseparable from our thoughts of Him.

*Very frequent changes should be carefully*

avoided, and a present practice continued till we are very sure that we can improve upon it. But there is no harm in trying a supposed improvement for a time, before we determine on taking it up as our ordinary practice. Great length of Forms is not desirable for most persons, though sometimes recitation may be used as a religious and profitable occupation, when the mind is not equal to a strong effort. But in our Devotions, properly so called, we ought always to aim rather at doing *well* than *much*, when we have once provided for all the necessary parts of them. These can be hardly less than, Placing ourselves in the Presence of God, Self-Examination, Confession, Prayer, Intercession, Praise and Thanksgiving, and Reading, with Meditation. It may be well to begin by writing down what belongs to each of these on a separate paper, and when we have ascertained what will serve our purpose, we may write the whole legibly, and with easy arrangement, in a durable and portable book. These are little points somewhat of course, but the neglect of any one of them may cause a check such as it is well to avoid.

## XVII.

**On Preparation for Holy Communion**

THE chief point to be considered in venturing to approach the Holy Communion is, that the conscience should be clear toward God and man. There are, however, some others, which ought not to be neglected, such as Prayer for a blessing upon it, collectedness of mind for the Service, and even what may be done toward securing a fit state of body for attending it.

The Church directs our attention mainly to the cleansing of the conscience, which must on no account be passed over. To come in wilful sin is to come to condemnation, not to blessing. And truly to remove sin from the conscience, the renunciation must be decided and complete, and the seeking of pardon humble and earnest. Deadly sin must be confessed as deadly sin, and not glossed over as mere human infirmity, and must be charged not upon our nature merely, but upon each one's own will and personal choice. What has been said of Confession and Self-Examination need not be here repeated, except as any point may bear very particularly on the *present purpose*.

In the first place it is necessary, every time we come to the Holy Communion, to look back at least upon the period since our last Communion, and to consider whether we have done anything knowingly against the Law of God, or anything carelessly or ignorantly, which we now know or believe to be against His Law, and for which we ought to judge ourselves before we come before Him. And then we must fairly make up our minds for the future to avoid any fault we have detected, and to watch carefully against it, and must humble ourselves heartily before Him for the past. Doing this, we are assured of the cleansing efficacy of the Blood of our Saviour, through which we may venture to present ourselves with perfect security of our acceptance. Not doing it, we have a perpetual source of defilement in us, not of nature merely, which He will not impute to those who are in Christ, nor of past sin, which He will wash away if we heartily renounce it, but of evil will, still choosing darkness rather than light, which He will not suffer, and which the very Blood of the Son of God cannot cleanse. God cannot call evil good, or good evil, for He cannot lie. One that comes to Him wilfully bringing with him an evil will, comes only to condemnation.

Those who do not Communicate very fre-

quently, should, at least for some time, till they have become ready at recollecting their faults, make use of a series of questions on the several heads of duty, every time they intend to do so, and should sometimes look back beyond the period of their last Communion, to see if there is anything in their past life which they have forgotten. And those who Communicate frequently, as, for instance, weekly, should look back over longer periods at stated times, and sometimes over their whole past lives. It is a painful thing, but still a real gain, to discover an old forgotten sin, and to humble ourselves afresh for it. Very often the traces of it will be found to remain in some evil habit, which we are thus the better enabled to overcome. However, when we have once made a really careful and searching review of our whole life, up to a certain period, and confessed the faults of it without reserve, and made up our minds to renounce these, further *search* in that period is not required. We should, in that case, look back on what we know, at times, for *humiliation*, and if any thing is shown to us in a new light, it is a gain.

And when you have truly made up your mind to forsake sin, and strive to obey heartily all God's Commandments, it is a *duty* to trust *entirely* in God's Mercy through Christ, and not to

suspect any backwardness to forgive on His part. When you are so minded, He may still chastise for your good, but you have His Word for it that He will not condemn. Any one who cannot assure himself on this head, should follow the advice given by the Church, and "open his grief" to some Minister of God, who may be able to tell him if anything further is required of him in order to the acceptance of his repentance, and may give him an authoritative pledge of pardon in the act of Absolution, when satisfied that he is rightly disposed for it.

The question of abstinence from the Holy Communion is rather one of the general regulation of Christian life, than of Private Devotion. Only it should be said, under the head we are now treating, that it is not well to be hindered from Communicating by mere scruples about acts of Preparation, especially if the opportunity comes unexpectedly, provided we have good reason to think we are rightly disposed, and have kept up our general preparedness with care. A *wilful* neglect of the usual Preparation, without just cause, is a different thing, and may, in any great instance of it, be a sufficient reason for denying ourselves the actual partaking of that Heavenly Feast: only then it ought to be made an occasion of distinct humiliation, and resolu-

tions to be more diligent in future, for it is a dangerous thing to "*forsake the assembling ourselves together, as the manner of some is.*"<sup>1</sup> If we have reason to think our system of Preparation too burdensome, let it be reviewed; and in any case of difficulty we may consult a spiritual guide.

As to peace with our neighbour, of course our duty extends only so far as our power. We must be in charity toward him, and must not wilfully leave him any just occasion of complaint against us. Restitution must be made where there has been wrong that admits of it, and the amends of self-humiliation when that is due. Ill-will must be overcome, where the wrong is on the other side, and if we cannot but be indignant at the injustice of another, and cannot even wish him to continue it unpunished, which we are not bound to wish, we may learn what is required of us as Christians, as the Lord's Prayer is enough to teach us, to desire and do our best, that he may repent and amend, and obtain God's pardon. And when another has done us wrong, we should readily accept his confession of error, without pressing him too hard on every point, so far as the wrong *to us* is concerned. We have our Lord's admonition<sup>m</sup> not to neglect this part of our Preparation, but rather even to delay our

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 25.

<sup>m</sup> S. Matt. v. 23, 24.

offering to God, than to bring it while anything that ought to be done toward a brother remains neglected. The matter itself may be slight, but it becomes serious if it is an occasion of sin.

Those who Communicate frequently, do well to pray daily that they may be enabled to Communicate worthily, and daily to give thanks for the opportunities afforded them, and always before and after each occasion to use at least some especial Prayer and Thanksgiving. Where it is less frequent, more time ought to be devoted to Preparation, because the whole state of the soul is likely to be less prepared, and to want more alteration; and in that case also, Prayer beforehand, and subsequent Thanksgiving, if possible, before returning to the world, and Prayer against falling into fresh temptations, should be carefully maintained.

As to collectedness of mind, it is a gift to be earnestly asked of God, but still we may do much in the way of removing hindrances to it. General regularity of life is a great help. Late and irregular hours, strong excitements, especially such as are sought for their own sake, light reading or other amusement encroaching on hours of Devotion, or, which is the same thing, on hours of sleep, so as to crowd and hurry Devotion, excessive occupations, even when useful, indulgence in

eating and drinking even short of extreme excess, living entirely amongst others without retirement, habits of calculating on future gratifications, are all of them hindrances to that calm and holy temper with which we ought to draw thus near to God. And it is well to look into our own minds, and mark those subjects of thought from which we ought, for quiet and safety's sake, to withdraw our attention, and then to carry out our resolution decidedly. And in like manner with our practice, it would be well to review it, especially with regard to this point, of the freedom of the mind for sacred occupation, and to regulate it accordingly. At least, on the approach of the Holy Communion, let such rules be adopted as may secure it, as far as lies in our power, from the encroachments of excitement or drowsiness.

In old times, as still in most foreign Churches, the rule of abstaining from food on the same day till after the Holy Communion, was most strictly kept, though, as S. Augustine<sup>n</sup> remarks, it was not observed in the first institution. Indeed old persons amongst ourselves remember when this practice was much more general in England than it is at present. It is not mentioned here with a view to insisting on it as necessary, though many

<sup>n</sup> Ep. liv. where, however, he maintains the universal practice of *the Church* to receive the Holy Communion fasting, except that *some did otherwise* on one day, in remembrance of the Institution.

might observe it with advantage, but in order to recommend at least extreme care that no self-indulgent meal, either of the previous day or of the morning, should be allowed to put its hindrances in the way of the best and clearest state of our faculties. With our late hours for the celebration of the Holy Communion, and the length of the Service when many attend, it may be even more reverent for *some* to provide against faintness and distraction by a moderate and simple meal, early in the day. S. Chrysostom is justly severe on those who allow themselves in excess *after* Communicating.<sup>o</sup> S. Charles Borromeo forbids taking any food for half, or at least a quarter of an hour after, and directs his clergy to teach all communicants to keep the mind the rest of the day in the attitude of Devotion, "waiting upon Christ its Guest" in religious exercises.<sup>p</sup> It would be well, certainly, if we thought more, in general, of watchfulness *after* Communion, to avoid marring what we have gained, and grieving Him Who has deigned to take up his abode within us.

Most thoughtful persons, at least, have some book for their direction, in preparing for the Holy Communion, but few, perhaps, *use* such

<sup>o</sup> On 1 Cor. xi. 27.

<sup>p</sup> *Instructiones Eucharistiae. In the Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis.*

helps with sufficient care. What we have chiefly to recommend, with respect to these is, that those who have them should make themselves well acquainted with their contents, and regularly *use* at least what is suitable for them. And it is well worth while to spend some time, at any rate, in thoughtful reading, and in the endeavour to lift up the heart toward God, however little we may appear to accomplish by it, and even though no great results may be perceived at the time of our Communicating. If a whole scheme of Preparation seems more than we can accomplish, it is well to use part on one occasion and part on another, and so to provide against the entire omission of anything profitable in it. Finally, there is one point set before us by the Church in her Catechism, besides the examination of our conscience with respect to repentance and faith in God's Mercy through Christ, which we should not fail to keep steadily in view,—the thankful remembrance of the Death of our Lord. For this we ought to provide, not only by thinking of it at the time of the Holy Communion, but also by giving our thoughts to it beforehand, and by such exercises of Prayer, Meditation, and Thanksgiving, as we are able to accomplish. And if long debarred from the opportunity of Communicating, *it is well* still to keep up this remembrance

by frequent acts of Devotion, and particularly by that of uniting ourselves in Spiritual Communion with our brethren to whom that privilege is granted, and with our Lord.

## XVIII.

## On Wandering Thoughts.

NEARLY every one who asks advice with respect to Private Devotion, complains of the difficulty of preventing Wandering Thoughts in any prolonged Devotional Exercise. Indeed the first evil we have to meet, in really serious people, with respect to distractions in their prayers, is the *discouragement* occasioned by this infirmity of their nature or ill effect of habit.

Let it be remembered, however, that God does not require of us what we cannot do, and that there cannot be anything in these distractions to cut us off from His Grace, unless they are wilfully encouraged or allowed. It *is* required of us that we should enter on every act of Devotion with the intention of applying the mind to it seriously, and should not wilfully and knowingly depart from that intention. The first step in the case of distractions is to clear the conscience of wilful sin in permitting or encouraging them.

There may, however, be persons who have *never* been guilty of such wilful disrespect to *Him Whom* they worship, and who yet are rea-

sonably dissatisfied with their own practice of Devotion, owing to the prevalence of Wandering Thoughts. And it must be confessed that the difficulty of meeting their case is very great.

There is no art or device by which we can secure the permanence of our own attention. It is, as it were, an ultimate fact in the mind, so that to change it would be almost to change our very selves. We have no keeper of our attention but our own being and character, for our will cannot act without the attention already awake, though it can control the attention when that is the case.

From this it appears that what we have to do is simple, but laborious. When the thing is in our minds we must put the will in action the right way, not in mere *wishing* that we were better able to command our thoughts, but in *willing* what we can really do towards it. The practical procedure required may be somewhat slow, like the approaches in a siege, but it is definite, natural, dutiful, and tolerably sure of effecting something, though it may fall short of complete success.

The first act of will that is in our power, when our attention is awake to the subject, is an act of prayer. We can at once pray to God to help us in fixing our attention, and to give us the spiritual fruit of our endeavours to worship Him. Even

in the midst of other prayers, as at Church, when any break in the service recalls us to the thought of what we are doing, as at the commencement of the Psalms, or Suffrages, or Litany, or at any of the changes in the Litany, &c., no time is lost by lifting up the heart to God with that request. Of course this should be habitually done at the beginning of any office of Devotion, public or private, in order that He may "grant us His Holy Spirit, that those things may please Him which we do at this present." Some have found the attention they were able to give to the whole Service answer very nearly to that which they gave to the Confession, and especially to the appeal it contains to the mercy of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer must be the groundwork of our endeavours, but we must build on it by striving. It has been already recommended that we should begin our Devotions with solemnly placing ourselves, in thought, in the Presence of our Maker. The consciousness of His Presence is the foundation of Devotional attention, and supports all the separate efforts of addressing to Him this and that Petition, Confession, or Thanksgiving, and alarms the soul when it feels itself drawn away from Him by any other thought or object.

*Then, when we are not at prayer, besides ask-*

ing the gift of attention from above, we may aim at it by several kinds of endeavour.

With respect to Devotion itself, we may resolve on the next occasion, if we remember it, to try and do what has been said, and also to endeavour to follow each petition, or other clause, with a real thought of the mind and concurrence of will, so far as we shall be able.

But we may also contribute to the same result by making conscience of our thoughts at all times, and by cultivating an orderly and attentive procedure in our every day business or study. The man whose thoughts wander very much in prayer, is probably not what he might be as a scholar or a man of business. He would do more if he would attend to each thing thoroughly while about it. They say of Newton that he wondered at so much being thought of his discoveries, since any one could have made them who would have taken the trouble to *attend*. And though scarce any one can at once begin, and attend to what he pleases for a length of time, when long habituated to inattention, yet most people could do something toward forming this very valuable habit, each time it came into their mind, by giving their next attention to its proper object as exclusively as possible. In order to do this it is necessary to exercise the self-denial of forbearing, at times, a

thought that would be interesting, and repressing the curiosity that would wish to ascertain this or that, which is not to the present purpose. This, of course is matter of absolute duty, during our Devotions, but it is more likely to be *remembered* then, if practised in other things.

Finally, much may be done by a due distribution of our time, and by forbearing to burden ourselves with unnecessary business or care, and limiting what we attempt to what we can reasonably hope to perform. We should have time to collect ourselves for Devotion, and time after it to think what is our next duty, and to enter on that also calmly and steadily, as in the sight of Him to Whom all our actions ought to be referred, as the end of our working, as well as of our being.

### Conclusion.

AND now, whether the reader has been pleased with these few remarks, or whether, as is more likely, he has been disappointed with them, as common place, and of little value, I have one request to make of him. It is, that if *anything* has struck him as suggesting a possible improvement in his own practice, he will *act upon it* without delay. Not that he will act rashly, but that he will take it immediately into consideration before he forgets it, and then will decisively put in use whatever he finds to be really desirable. To readers who will do this, even an indifferent work may not prove altogether unprofitable, while to those who read without any such view, the very best writers are likely to do little good.



Let the Words of my mouth,  
and the  
Meditation of my heart,  
be alway acceptable in Thy Sight,  
O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.  
Amen.



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